

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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CHAPTER XXIV. IN THE LANE.

ARTHUR NUGENT was not entirely without a conscience; but from a child he had lacked the power to turn away from anything that seemed pleasant, and now honour was not strong enough to hold him back from a flirtation with a pretty girl. Only a flirtation; he did not admit the thought of having embarked on

A great flood that whirls me to the sea.

He saw no harm in looks and words that Maggie, shocked, terrified, enchanted, might take in their fullest meaning. In his heart, too, in spite of all that Poppy was, of her generous soul and her beautiful old home, he considered himself a tricked and injured man, quite justified in taking any distraction he could find by the way. But, playing as he did with edged tools, he had no idea of destroying himself or anybody else. He would not, in fact, acknowledge to himself that the irresistible attraction which drew him to Maggie meant anything more than he had experienced twenty times before. That circumstances made this special flirtation specially awkward, specially dishonourable, was certainly unfortunate; but yet he thought of it as only a flirtation, more amusing, more exciting than usual, just because more dangerous. He did not yet know, or let himself know, that his feeling for this girl already deserved a stronger name, or that their first meeting in the wood had been, in fact, a crisis.

With the careless impulsiveness which

was part of his nature—generally so softened off by an idle gentleness and sweetness of temper that only those who knew him well were aware of it—Arthur could not resist talking about Maggie to the Rector as they walked on, any more than he had resisted talking about her to Poppy in their drive, an hour or two before. He began pitying the girl for the desolate life she must lead with her old grandfather.

The Rector answered rather shortly that they were happy enough together.

Arthur then suggested that it was an awkward position for a girl like that, "pretty enough to be anybody." Perhaps Poppy's kindness had not been quite the wisest thing; because of course she must stick to the poor girl—she could not make her unhappy by throwing her over. It was awfully difficult.

The Rector was not at all inclined to discuss either Maggie's position or Poppy's wisdom with this young man, whose words reminded him unpleasantly of Mrs. Nugent's remarks about other young men, and her allusion to pretty housemaids. He observed more drily still that he saw no particular awkwardness in Miss Farrant's position, which was not such as to make her dependent on anybody. Porphyria's personal influence had been very good for her. No one would ever do a kindness if it was necessary to stop and think of all the far-off consequences.

"Poppy is rather worried about her, though," said Arthur. "She is afraid she may fancy herself neglected."

"Is she?" said Mr. Cantillon. "We must hope that Miss Farrant is capable of taking care of herself. Thank you, Captain Nugent. Here is the bridge. Now I will say good night, and I hope you will hurry back out of this damp air. Much obliged

for your kind escort—and—well, good night."

Arthur insisted on following him across the narrow bridge. "Miss Latimer won't be satisfied if I don't," he said lightly.

The Rector thanked him again, but said nothing more. The young man retreated across the bridge and the meadow as quickly as his best friends could have wished, while the Rector climbed the slope to his garden rather slowly and thoughtfully.

Maggie's tears, everybody's opinion, the absurd fact that even Porphyria's future husband chose already to interest himself in her friendships, in Bryans affairs—all this made a series of tiresome impressions on the Rector's mind. Yet he really did not know why Arthur's remarks had been so very disagreeable to him. "Good-naturedly meant, of course." And, after all, it had been nice of the young fellow to walk home with him. Still nicer of Fanny to suggest it. Dear Fanny!

Arthur walked back down the quiet road, seeing nobody, except some man, a good deal in advance of him, who went in at the back gates of the Court. He was a little nervous at passing under the high walls and barred windows of Church Corner; but all was silent and still. He turned down the green lane, passed the gate into the wood, and walked a few yards further, to the corner of the garden wall where she had disappeared, without seeing anything of Maggie. His first impression was that she had not waited for him, and he muttered an angry word. Coming close to the wall, he saw the rough steps which she and Poppy crossed so often. He was about to spring up them, to venture into the dark garden in search of her, when she came forward suddenly from the shadow of the poplars just below.

Arthur went up to her and took her hand, but she withdrew it instantly, and stood before him with her arms folded and her head erect, not at all like a creature that wanted pity.

"Captain Nugent, why did you ask me to wait for you here?"

Arthur was a little disconcerted, but not much. Somehow it struck him that this little pose and speech had been prepared while she waited.

"Are you angry with me?" he said very gently.

"Of course I am."

"But why? Was it so wrong? I wanted to ask you to tell me something,

and I never see you alone, so what was I to do? You don't mind, really? I have not offended you? It isn't late. We might have met accidentally, as we did in the wood that first day."

Maggie shook her head.

"What am I to tell you?" she said.

"I must go in directly."

The tone of her voice was already a little softer. She was too much excited and frightened in those strange moments quite to know what she was doing; but she was also clever enough to hold her own to a certain extent. It would be absurd, she felt, as well as impossible, to turn away entirely and refuse to answer him, when she had already yielded so far as to wait for him in the lane.

"I am afraid somebody may pass," said Arthur. "Would the wood be safer—or are you afraid of the dark? I'm awfully fond of the wood, you know."

"Nobody will pass," said Maggie, standing still in the same attitude.

But a shiver passed over her from head to feet, and she bit her lips and clenched her fingers that he might not know it as he stood there looking at her. His silence was more trying than his words.

"Make haste, please," she said. "I must go."

"Don't be unkind," said Arthur. "Your grandfather thinks you are at the Court."

"Yes. I am deceiving him," the girl said. "And you——"

Arthur started a little at the sudden passion in her voice, which flashed out in those few words like a flame. Her meaning was not difficult to understand, but he could and did ignore it.

"I only want to ask you," he said, coming a step nearer, "why you look so unhappy? Do you know, you are awfully changed since I saw you first. When you met me that day in the wood I thought you were just as happy as you were beautiful. Whose fault is it? When a woman is like you—beautiful, lovely, sweet—she ought to have nothing to trouble her, ought she?"

Maggie could neither speak nor move. The sudden instinct of anger with him and herself had died down; even the excitement of that meeting had died down, and she only knew that she was, as he said, unhappy. But then it was such hopeless misery, so utterly beyond curing; and every word he said, every minute he stayed, only made it ten times worse.

"Oh, you forget," she murmured;

and she hardly knew that Arthur was holding her hand again.

"Is that my answer? No, I don't forget. If I did I shouldn't care, should I? Whose fault is it? Tell me, is it mine? Tell me! Dear, what is the use of pretending not to understand each other?"

"You are mistaken—I don't understand you," stammered Maggie.

"You can't look me in the face and say that."

"What do you mean? I have been rather low," she went on quickly, with a sort of nervous terror. "It was only because I felt lonely. Oh, I was very stupid! I wanted—but if you don't know I can't explain. What shall I do!"

"My dear child, don't I know? More than you do yourself, perhaps. Why am I unhappy too?"

"You are not unhappy! Oh, what shall I do!"

"I am though—miserable. You might be a little sorry for me, Maggie."

"What shall I do!" the girl murmured once again.

"Love me," Arthur whispered, so low that she only just heard it. She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

Poor Maggie! It is pitiful when love comes into a girl's life in such a shape as this. She had had her dreams like other girls, and plenty of them. She had studied the subject a little in books, and far more in her own young imagination. Otherwise she knew nothing. The only young man who had ever come into her life at all intimately—Geoffrey Thorne, in the last few weeks—was too quiet, too matter-of-fact, too much wrapped up in his art, to be made a subject of romance. But since she met Arthur Nugent in the wood, and saw the admiration in his eyes, he had filled every thought of her foolish young mind. She listened for his footstep and the sound of his voice, and yet shrank from them; she would not meet his eyes, though knowing well enough how often they sought hers. The temporary loss of her friend gave her a good excuse for being unhappy; and here she deceived herself a little, as well as other people. Honestly, she would never have believed that she could be false to Poppy; but then she did not dream that Arthur was capable of it. In him it seemed sheer madness; in herself, wickedness beyond imagination. If this was love—this irresistible power that made her listen to Arthur, that made his presence feel like something necessary to life—then love,

indeed, was very far from being anything happy or beautiful. It was a strange mixture, in which the strongest feeling might almost be called agony.

For, till now, the deepest affection of which Maggie's nature was capable had been given to her friend. No one knew Poppy better than she did; no one had loved and honoured her more, though in a partly selfish fashion. In this, at the bottom of things, Maggie's treason was even deeper than Arthur's.

The sobs could not last long, for his arm stole round her to comfort her, and in the next few minutes she forgot past and future, forgot all duty, all danger, and all the impossibilities that hedged them both round. She did not even think of anything that was to follow on that foolish, passing time. It indeed was too short for words, almost for thoughts. Maggie lifted her head with a sudden start, and struggled back from the arm that was holding her.

"There's somebody coming through the wood."

Arthur let her go without a word; she sprang to the steps and vanished into the garden. Lingered a moment he heard nothing, and was inclined to distrust the girl's quick ears. Was it only an excuse the little gipsy had made to get away?

Then, to be sure, there was a rustling of leaves, and Arthur started off suddenly in a violent hurry, for he must not be caught standing here, and the lane ended just below. It would have been better for him to meet this person, whoever it might be, in the darkness of the wood. As it was, his hesitation brought him to the gate at the same moment that a man came up to it, touching his hat, from the other side. The moon was brighter now, and Captain Nugent was unmistakeable.

The man who met him was an under-keeper belonging to the Court, a smart young fellow, whom Arthur had already noticed once or twice.

"Good night, Stokes. Nice evening. Are you going home?" he said, as he passed through the gate.

"Yes, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Sutton Bryans, sir."

"In one of Mr. Thorne's houses?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! well—nice evening. You have a longish walk. I have just been as far as the foot-bridge with Mr. Cantillon—not quite safe for him to cross at night by

himself. By-the-bye, don't you think that bridge is a little shaky?"

"I haven't noticed it, sir."

"I fancied it was, rather. Who has that field?"

"Mr. Ling, sir."

"What, the farmer at the other end of the village?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Stokes, I must not keep you now. I suppose you know every inch of this country. I shall see more of you next week; my brother and some friends are coming down to shoot. Bird tells me there are plenty of pheasants."

"Mr. Bird's taken a lot of pains with them, sir."

"So have you, I expect. Are you married, Stokes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any children?"

"Two little uns."

"Much trouble with poachers?"

Stokes grinned slightly at the transition, but it was of a piece with other oddities about the Captain that evening. He seemed to be talking in his sleep—sharp, and eager, and absent, all at once. Thus the friendly conversation with Stokes rather missed its mark. The keeper replied satisfactorily, however, and the young gentleman, wishing him another friendly good night, put a couple of half-crowns into his hand.

"One for each of the young ones," he said, and laughed.

Stokes thanked him and walked quickly away, not without one or two sharp glances in the direction from which he very well knew that Captain Nugent had come. He thought "something was up," without quite knowing what or why, and Arthur, by his foolish present, had only strengthened the impression. And to set brains working, in a country village, is the same thing as to set tongues wagging. Stokes thought about it all the way home, where he arrived with his hat much on one side, and his mouth twisted into a puzzled and rather distressed whistle.

On the next evening, about the same time, when the work of the day was done, Geoffrey Thorne sat quietly drawing at the table in the old living-room at his home. He had not hunted that day. His father and Frank had gone to Oxford, and were not yet in. Lucy and the dogs sat round the blazing fire, which glowed and flickered on the dark oak furniture and the heavy rafters of the old room.

Lucy was knitting. Sometimes she looked up sharply at her brother, and there was a sort of anxiety in these keen glances. Geoffrey looked tired and pale. He had accepted his fate with patience, and bore it well. There was no more resistance or rebellion; but he seemed to be settling down on a dead level of low, quiet spirits, without any of the brightness, the eagerness, the enthusiasm, which had belonged to him before. Lucy supposed she ought to be glad of the change, but it made her angry.

"They have made an old man of him among them all," she said to herself; and from this sweeping accusation she did not exclude the Rector. You may advise too much patience, too much self-forgetfulness, to a character like Geoffrey's.

Some new worry that evening had evidently attacked Lucy, and could be heard in the hurried click of her needles.

"Geoff," she said suddenly, "do you like Captain Nugent?"

"There isn't much to dislike," he answered after a moment, still stooping over his drawing.

"You think him a fool?"

"No. I didn't say so. Why should I?"

"Because I'm rather afraid he is one, and something worse too."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, listen to this."

Unchecked by his frequent exclamations of disbelief and scorn, she went on to tell him a singular story. It had all come through Annie Stokes, the young keeper's wife, who had been at the farm that day washing. It set forth how Jim Stokes, the evening before, had been followed along the village by Captain Nugent. The servants at the Court said that he had walked home with the Rector and Miss Farrant. Evidently, therefore, when Jim saw him first he was coming back from the Rector's house, and they had dropped Miss Farrant on their way. An hour later—it was not really so much—Jim had started home through the wood and had met Captain Nugent at the gate leading into the blind lane. He had come up the lane, not down it; and it ended in a mere field-path, a few yards below the corner steps that led into Mr. Farrant's garden. Where had the young gentleman been all that time? Jim thought him rather queer; he asked him a lot of questions in a hurry, as if he did not care for the answers, but wanted to show, as Jim expressed it, that he was "all there." Finally he gave him

five shillings, and hoped to see more of him next week.

"Five shillings is hardly enough to make a man hold his tongue," said Lucy with a sneer.

"But they must hold their tongues," Geoffrey said, staring at her.

"She is a silly girl," his sister went on. "I quite expected she would get into some scrape some day. The old man is right in wanting a steady husband for her. Everybody has noticed how Captain Nugent stares at her in church."

"But, Lucy, you must stop them. Not for her sake—don't you see?"

"Poor thing! Well—there's father, so we will say no more now," said Lucy.

JASMIN : THE BARBER, POET, AND EMINENT PHILANTHROPIST.

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

To have an eye to business may appear somewhat prosaic; but poets rarely prosper by laziness of life. Jasmin was a genius; and having great capacity for taking pains, he won his laurels by sheer industry as well as natural gifts. Born with his mouth full of singing birds—"la bouco pleno d'auvelous" is the quaint old Gascon phrase—he yet might have lived idly, and scarce opened his lips to let his song escape. But while sticking to his shaving-dish, he worked also at his rhymes, and having planted a firm foot upon the first slope of Parnassus, he no more was driven to his garret when he felt a wish to commune with the Muse. Instead of seeking inspiration from the squeaking of the rats which haunted that top storey, he now might wander of an evening by the banks of the Garonne, and invoke the nightingale to help him in his songs; or—being master-barber now, and not merely 'prentice drudge—he might stroll in early morning to take a lesson from "God's poet," the skylark, blithely carolling and soaring there in sunny France, like as in fair Italy when Sordello sung.

Often, too, his wife would accompany his musings; for far from throwing his pens into the fire any more, she was able with her patois to assist him in his rhymes. O! peasant birth herself, she knew the Gascon language better than her husband; and as Molière would read his plays first to his housekeeper, to judge if they would please, so Jasmin first recited his fresh verse to Mariette.

We may fancy that Jasmin was not a little proud of finding a good listener in one who had at first turned a deaf ear to his Muse. Indeed, he showed a proper pride in her society, and when asked to parties, as a poet and reciter, would refuse all invitations where his wife was not included; which was more than many poets—Tom Moore, for instance, would have done.

A second volume of the "Curipapers" appeared in '35, and was very favourably noticed by Sainte-Beuve in the "Revue des deux Mondes." In the same year, too, was published "The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé," a rather more ambitious poem, which Longfellow has translated into admirable English, though, of course, much of the flavour of the Gascon has escaped. This poem formed the first of Jasmin's public recitations, which grew speedily famous throughout the South of France. It was read by him at Bordeaux, on the twenty-sixth of August, in the same year, '35, in the presence of the Prefect, the Academy, and chief people of the place. Sainte-Beuve described it as "true poetry, rich from the same sources, gilded with the same imagery," as that of Theocritus and the ancient Greeks. The Bordeaux audience were loud in their applause of the reciter, who was entertained by the Archbishop and a score of other grand folks, and after ten days' teasing returned contentedly to his ryebread, and his razors, and his modest little shop. "To sing of joyous poverty one must be joyful and poor," he wrote to a rich merchant of Toulouse, who tempted him with "dreams of avarice," and of a fortune to be realised by a few years of Paris life; and he added serenely: "Is money the only thing for a man to seek who feels in his heart the least spark of poetry?" a question which some poets may possibly have found themselves reluctant to debate.

Just as Dante virtually created the Italian, so Jasmin put new life into the old Gascon language, which, but for his reviving efforts, might ere now have died out. His next poem, "Franconnette," a chivalrous romance in rhyme, whereof the hero was a blacksmith, was in the year '40 recited at Toulouse, before the Mayor and fifteen hundred of the chief folk of the city. The receipts were given wholly to the local charities, as had been done at Bordeaux by Jasmin's express wish; and the manuscript of the poem was presented to Toulouse. Grand feastings and orations

followed in due course. A crown of jasmynes and immortelles was presented at a special banquet of the barbers; and a golden laurel branch was given later by the city to the poet who had raised his voice to help their poor. This latter gift unhappily reached Jasmin on the day his mother died, and his joy at its reception was clouded by his sorrow at her loss.

In the year '42 the poet took his son Edward to Paris, and tramped about with boylike ardour for a week; seeing all the sights and writing of their wonders gaily to his wife. Then he called upon Sainte-Beuve, Charles Nodier, and Jules Janin, whose three heads seemed to form a very Cerberus of criticism; but who, instead of growling, received him with kind welcome for his Gascon Muse. Invited to recite, he appeared first at the house of M. Thierry, the distinguished blind historian, who had sacrificed his eyesight to his excess of study. Choosing, perhaps oddly, his "Blind Girl" for recitation, Jasmin purposely omitted a few mournful lines bewailing her sad lot. Being corrected by the careful memory of his host, he gave them with such pathos that the room was moved with tears; Thierry protesting that the poet must himself have suffered blindness, ere he could so vividly have described the agony it caused.

This reception within well-nigh the walls of the Academy, and recital in the presence of the chief writers in France, formed the prelude to Jasmin's triumphal march through Paris, where he daily won applause from fashionable lips. To culminate his glory, he was honoured by a mandate to pay a private visit to the Palace of Neuilly. There he was most cordially welcomed by the King, who won his guest's warm heart by a few old Gascon words. A banquet, too, was given by the perruquiers of Paris, where Jasmin spoke some verses he had written in their praise. It would seem that Gascony for centuries has been a country famed for barbers, and in Paris half the hairdressers are of Gascon birth. In old legends the barber nearly always is a Gascon.

After a month of sight-seeing and feasting, which must have stored his mind with memories for all his after life, the poet joyfully returned to his humble little home, and resumed his usual labour with his verses and his strop. The Muse aiding him, he

wrote a little poem, describing his late visit. Repressing manfully his vanity, he broke into no blatant blowing of his trumpet, but related simply his impressions and ideas, ending with the rather sensible reflection that "Paris makes me proud, but Agen makes me happy."

Though still working as a barber, Jasmin as a poet was now a famous man. His verses were translated into English, Italian, and Spanish; and in November '42 they were reviewed with no small favour in the "Athenæum," a journal which at that time was not given to high praise. The critic likened him to Rachel for his power of declamation, and declared that he was "an actor superior to any now in France." After a slight sketch—doubtless taken on the spot—of his humble little shop, and "smiling, dark-eyed wife," who proudly showed the presents and the laurels he had won, the writer thus describes the person of the poet, and his varied vocal powers:

"Jasmin is handsome in person, with eyes full of intelligence, of good features, a mobility of expression absolutely electrifying, a manly figure, and an agreeable address. His voice is harmony itself, and its changes have an effect seldom experienced on or off the stage. The melody attributed to Mrs. Jordan seems to approach it nearest."

Dr. Smiles suggests that probably the writer was Miss Costello, who, in another page of hers, describes thus a recital which the poet gave her at his house:

"He began in a rich soft voice, and as we advanced we found ourselves carried away by the spell of his enthusiasm. His eyes swam in tears; he became pale and red; he trembled; he recovered himself; his face was now joyous, now exulting, gay, jocose; in fact, he was twenty actors in one; he rang the changes from Rachel to Bouffé, and he finished by relieving us of our tears, and overwhelming us with astonishment. . . . He has handsome hands, which he uses with infinite effect; and on the whole he is the best actor of the kind I ever saw. I could quite understand what a Troubadour or jongleur might be; and I look upon Jasmin as a revived specimen of that extinct race."

The poet at this interview announced to his fair visitor, with pardonable pleasure, that the King had granted him a pension of a thousand francs. And when twitted with the current chatter about his vanity, Jasmin excused himself by frankly owning:

"Well, I am a child of Nature, and I cannot hide my feelings."

Another English journal, the "Westminster Review," was also loud in commendation of the "Curlpapers," crowning it by a comparison of Jasmin with Burns; though Dr. Smiles thinks Allan Ramsay a post more in point. The reviewer does full justice to Jasmin's charm of pathos and sweet purity of thought; declaring that "he calls nothing unclean but vice and crime. He sees meanness in nothing but in the shame, the affectation, and the spangles of outward show. . . . All he seeks is the sterling and the real. He recognises the sparkle of the diamond as well as that of the dewdrop. But he will not look upon paste."

"My poetry comes from my heart," says Jasmin in a letter to M. Léonce de Lavergne; and from a heart so good, so tender, and so true, there never could come anything but tenderness and truth.

One other picture we must give of Jasmin the poet, ere sketching in a few lines Jasmin the philanthropist. There is a little book of travel now seldom to be seen, except perchance on an old bookstall, entitled "Claret and Olives," from the pen of Angus Reach, a well-known writer forty years ago. In this volume he tells of a trip Southward in the year 1852, and of how the fame of Jasmin was so sounded in his ears, that he went out of his way to beard the barber in his shop. Jasmin was discovered in the act of shaving a plump customer, and was found to be a "well-built and strongly limbed man of about fifty, with a large, massive head, and a broad pile of forehead overhanging two piercingly bright black eyes, and features which would be heavy were they allowed a moment's repose from the continual play of the facial muscles, sending a never-ending series of varying expressions across the dark, swartly visage."

Invited to a chat, when his barber's work was done, the poet dashed at once "with the most clattering volubility and fiery speed of tongue, and with the most redundant energy of gesture," into a sort of rhapsody on poetry and patois, and the blessings of their union; declaring it to be as possible to write poems in arithmetic as in school-taught modern French. The language, he protested, had been "licked and kneaded, and tricked out, and plumed, and dandified, and scented, and minced, and ruled square, and chipped . . . and pranked out, and polished, and musca-

dined, until, for all honest purposes of true high poetry, it was mere unavailable and contemptible jargon." No, no, to write poetry, you must learn the language of the peasants, who sing as Nature teaches them, and who live in the bright sunshine among the birds and the sweet wild flowers, and not in stuffy schools of science, or in noisy city streets.

Rattling on in this way, and scarce pausing to take breath, he rushed about the shop, pulling out old piles of newspapers, and pointing out a phrase which chanced to hit his fancy, or rolling out a burst of Jovian thunder on the heads of genius-misconceiving, pigmy, whipper-snapper critics. One review especially, the "Tintinum" he called it, had given him great pleasure; and when the English writer owned that such a journal was unknown to him, "Pourtant," cried Jasmin joyously, "je vous le ferai voir"; and after hunting for his "Tintinum," in triumph he displayed the famous "Athenæum"!

In the year '48, when the Republic was established, Jasmin was asked to represent his native town in Parliament. An influential deputation waited on him formally, and found him, not indeed like Cincinnatus at the plough, but quite as peacefully employed in the task of shelling peas. Jasmin declined the proffered honour, and went on calmly with his work, confessing that he had a strong faith in a monarchy, but insisting that, to govern well the country, men should be pure and true. Visiting Paris shortly after, he declined the honour of a reception by the President, but being invited to Saint-Cloud in May, 1853, he recited with such pathos as to touch even the cold hearts of the Court. "Mais, poète, c'est un véritable scène de mouchoirs," said the Emperor, who possibly was less moved than his wife. And Jasmin then petitioned for the pardon of a lawyer friend of his, who had been exiled since the coup d'état, and whom the Emperor—his wife prompting him—recalled to France forthwith.

Among his other blushing honours, the barber-bard was given a gold medal by the French Academy, together with a prize of three thousand francs, to which two thousand more were added by distributing his poems to "the Forty" and their friends. He was likewise made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, in company with Balzac and Alfred de Musset, the young Byron of France, who probably had never

read a line that Jasmin wrote. A few years later, as a mark of his self-sacrificing charity, he was made Chevalier of the Order of St. Gregory, this being the sole instance of a barber being chosen for such honour by a Pope.

Another proud day in his life was the twenty-third of July, 1843, the day of consecration of the new Church of Vergt in Périgord, rebuilt from funds which Jasmin, by six months of reciting—often twice or thrice a day—had well-nigh wholly earned. The ceremony was performed by the Archbishop of Rheims, attended by five bishops and some three hundred priests. Although Vergt was but a village, more than fifteen hundred people were gathered to the scene; and afterwards at table, when the appetites, both clerical and laic, were appeased, Jasmin recited a new poem composed for the occasion, called "*Lou Prêste sans Glèyzo*"—"le prêtre sans église"—descriptive of the noble influence of a Christian church.

But his proudest day of all was the sixth of February, 1854, when in the great *Salle des Illustres* at Toulouse, in the presence of the Archbishop, and the Prefect, and all those of the chief rank and beauty in the place, Jasmin was enrolled as *Maître-à-Jeux* of the Academy of Toulouse. We can fancy that the Gascon poet valued this diploma above his other honours, more even than the crown of gold presented two years afterwards by his native townsmen. The title linked his name, through five long centuries of song, with the last of the old troubadours, whose language he had striven with such ardour to revive, but whom in his noble and unselfish charity he very far excelled. "*Largesse*" was a word familiar to the ears of those who listened to such minstrels, but Jasmin never echoed it, excepting for the poor, whose cause he never ceased to plead.

"*Qui trabaillo, Thion li baillo*," is an old Gascon proverb, signifying, "God helps him who works."

Jasmin worked hard all his life; and, kind as he was to others, he most thoroughly deserved his success. From the trials of his childhood he well knew the pinch of poverty; and, when well-to-do, he laboured to save others from the hardships he had felt. Prosperous alike with razoring and rhyming, he chiefly became famous by his powerful reciting; and every penny he thus earned was devoted

to the poor. First speaking for their benefit during the hard winter of 1837, for nearly thirty years he raised his voice in their behalf, and earned for charity no less than fifteen hundred thousand francs. From Bordeaux to Marseilles, from Lyons to Toulouse, scarce a town in Southern France but called on him for help; scarce an orphanage or hospital which he did not assist. To save the cost of carriage, wherever it was possible, he would walk from place to place, often leaving home for weeks in his pilgrimage of song. Poor girls met him on the road, and there strewed posies in his path; and fine ladies were so moved by the pathos of his tones that, at the close of a recital, they tore flowers from their hair and flung them at his feet.

In the fourth book of his "*Curlpapers*," which was given to the world the year before his death, Jasmin notes that he spent only one hundred and forty-seven and a half francs—i.e., less than six pounds—during a circuit of some fifty days, wherein he gained for charity twenty thousand francs. Nor should it be forgotten that his journeys were mostly made in winter, when poverty pinched most; and when in rain, and storm, and snow he bravely tramped from town to town, heedless of his health. In truth it may be said, he laid his life down for the poor. The sudden chills, and changes from hot rooms to wintry streets, undermined by slow degrees his splendidly strong health. But, though suffering at times acutely and in great need of rest, he nobly struggled on for years, and would never flinch when called forth to some charitable work. Breaking down somewhat suddenly and unexpectedly at last, he gave his last recital—"the song of the stricken swan"—only a few months before his death.

This final recitation took place in '64 in the town of Villeneuve-sur-Lot; to which, although the way was rather long and the wind was doubtless cold—for it was in the month of January—and the minstrel was infirm, although not very old, he, nevertheless, determined as usual to walk. He was helped along the road by some of his kind friends; and, when he reached the theatre, he appeared well-nigh worn out. But after a short rest he sprang firmly to his feet, and never had his voice seemed more spirited and strong. For three long hours in that hot, crowded theatre he declaimed with all his might; and was so

utterly exhausted that he could hardly travel home. Nursed by his wife, he lay prostrate for a fortnight, and then feebly lingered till the fifth of October in the same year, when he died quite calmly, with his eyes fixed tenderly upon his dear Mariette.

On the eighth he was buried, the Prefect and others of chief note among the neighbours being bearers of his pall; and the last poem he had written being placed upon his breast. This was a piece composed during his illness, and was prompted by Renan's famous "*Vie de Jésus*," which had recently appeared. Jasmin called the poem "an act of faith," and declared that he was happy in thus ending his poetical career.

And, surely, if self-sacrifice be taken as a test, a purer, better Christian than this barber-poet it might be hard to meet. Long may his memory be green as the laurels which he won, and nobly stimulate to charity the hearts which it may reach! How much the world might be the better if there were more such gifted barbers in it, and such generous-minded men! Christians such as Jasmin, strong in faith and pure of life; unstinting in self-sacrifice and liberal in help; unselfish in their wishes and frugal in their wants—such men are not too common anywhere in these grasping, money-grubbing, and all-doubting days. Nor are there many countries where their presence is more needful than in socialistic, "*fin-de-siècle*" France. As Sainte-Beuve has declared, "*Si la France possédait dix poètes comme Jasmin, dix poètes de cette influence, elle n'aurait pas à craindre de révolutions.*"

MILITARY BANDS AND KNELLER HALL.

WHAT can more pleasantly ruffle the surface of life's dull stream than the music of a military band? It comes upon us, unexpectedly perhaps, with the muffled tramp of the battalion of redcoats, arresting for the moment the thronging crowd. Everybody falls into step with the music, and feels himself a soldier for the nonce. And it is the band that gives spirit to the march and life to the parade, that relieves the dull monotony of barrack or cantonment, and reconciles to the dust and mud of camps and bivouacs. The band, to quote the Queen's Regulations, is "essential to the credit and appearance of the regiment," and it is even something

more, as the hearth, as it were, about which, no matter where the clime, gather the soldiers of every rank with equal interest, the wives, the children of the regiment, even to its pet animals and favourite dogs.

It was always so, probably. "When Music, heavenly maid, was young," like other young maids she had a fancy for a soldier, and marched away, whether with the "hoplites" of the Athenian guards, or the smart legionaries of Rome. We may hear, too, the conches and war-horns of the barbarians summoning their heroes to battle, sounds that some of our own bandsmen may have heard among Ashantees or Zulus in these latter days. And if we owe our reeds, and flutes, and stringed instruments to peaceful shepherds and herdsmen, all those of sounding brass are clearly from the military side of the house, and may trace their pedigree to the infantry trumpet or the bent clarion of the Roman cavalry.

With us the military band seems to be coeval with the existence of the regular army. The Guards have had something in the way of a band from the first, though originally, perhaps, only fifes, bugles, horns, and drums. The Cameronians are said to have begun by singing hymns on the march, but the military spirit soon overpowered the religious. And curious enough were some of the old military instruments of music; old pipes, old zinks, flutes, and pommers, bass horns, serpents, and cromornes, jingling johnnies, and bassoons. There would be a huge negro, perhaps, to clash the cymbals, and a whiskered pandour with the tambourine. But all this time the band was only an ornamental appendage to the regiment. It was supported entirely by the officers, and the bandsmen were performers who wore a military uniform, often fantastic enough, and often quite different from that of the regiment, according to the taste of the commanding officer. There is a story told of a newly-appointed Colonel, in the days of the old martinets, who expressed his dissatisfaction with the band as it marched past, because the trombones did not dress the slides of their instruments properly. One man would be half-way down while another was just starting. In vain it was represented to him that different instruments were of different compass, and required different manipulation. That was nothing to him; he must have uniformity in the ranks.

The old system produced some excellent bands, and was served by some excellent bandmasters, chiefly of German extraction. The Guards' band performed in Paris before the allied sovereigns in 1815, and two years before that date Charles Godfrey, whose name is inseparably connected with that famous band, had joined as bandsman from the Surrey Militia. Some pleasant passages in the life of a bandmaster of the old school are to be found in the pages of the "Bandsman." Thus, the regiment not being in favour with the Scotch—owing to some old historic grudge, dating from the '45—the Colonel and the bandmaster put their heads together so that nothing but Scottish airs of the good old sort should be played when the regiment marched out in Scotland. The effect was magical; nothing had ever pleased the Scots half so much, and the only danger was of the demoralisation of the band by innumerable "haufs" of whiskey thrust upon them by their admirers. Some years after the regiment was ordered to Dublin. Colonel and bandmaster nodded their heads sagaciously. What was sauce for Sandy must also be good for Pat, and the bandmaster took out all his favourite Irish airs; but, better versed in music than politics, some debateable party tunes had glided into his repertory. Result—brickbats and shillelaghs, and a general riot in the city, and a hot memorandum from the Castle to wake up the commanding officer.

A pleasant story, too, is told of the Welsh Fusiliers, or rather of their favourite goat. The King's Own and the Fusiliers were quartered together at Winchester, and Billy had the run of the barracks, and would always fall in with the drum-major at the head of the regiment when it marched out. But sometimes when the King's Own marched out Billy would fall in with them. "But such was his knowledge of music," says the old bandmaster, "that if the band struck up a march that was never played by the Twenty-third, he would turn round and butt at the bandsmen, and then discovering his mistake, would march away disgusted."

It was in 1857 that the old order of things gave way, and from that time bandsmen were recruited as soldiers, enlisted on the same terms, and drilled like other soldiers till they are qualified to serve in the ranks, on any emergency. And dating from that period all appointments of bandmasters in the British army are made from those who have been trained at Kneller

Hall. At the present time regimental bands are recruited chiefly from schools and public institutions, where the boys have had some preliminary training in instrumental music. At the head of these are the Duke of York's School, Chelsea, and the Royal Hibernian Military School, Dublin, which are able to supply only a small portion of the demand; while District Schools, the "Exmouth" training ship, the Gordon Boys' Home, and institutions of the same character are applied to in their turn by the commanding officers of regiments which require band boys. These boys, enlisted from fourteen to sixteen years of age, may be put to bugling and drumming, but if they show any marked capacity for music, sooner or later they will find their way to Kneller Hall for a course of training and instruction.

The official establishment of a band for a battalion of infantry consists of a bandmaster, a sergeant, a corporal or lance-sergeant, twenty privates and eight boys—thirty-one in all. The cavalry bands are smaller still, twenty-three in all, and these numbers are certainly too small for effective orchestration. But in practice the band is reinforced by extra bandsmen, who are often old bandsmen who have joined the ranks in expectation of speedier promotion, and who play for the love of the thing, in addition to ordinary duty. The bandmaster has his pay as warrant officer of five shillings a day, with seventy pounds a year from the band funds, and his share of what the band earns by private engagements, which varies according to the station and the reputation of the band. The band sergeant and corporal generally receive in addition to their military pay a monthly allowance from the band fund, and the bandsmen something in addition to the soldier's daily shilling, while all share in the private earnings of the band according to their degree. The Government contributes to the band fund as much as pays the bandmaster's salary; and it also provides the brass instruments. The other expenses of the band fall upon the officers, and still form a substantial deduction from their pay.

The British bandsman's life is not that of a sybarite. He rises at six, and is ready to turn out neat and tidy if the band is required to attend morning drill at seven. At eight there is breakfast, at nine practice till ten, at ten full concerted practice till noon. Then comes dinner, and after dinner practice again for the young hands for a couple

of hours. Once or twice a week the band plays at the officers' mess, and on other nights it is to be hoped there are engagements, which the bandsman prepares for with alacrity, as they not only bring "kudos" to the band, but some small addition to the pay of the performer.

The most important epoch in the life of the young bandsman is his period of training at Kneller Hall. He arrives there a pupil, perhaps with some proficiency in some special instrument, but with a great deal to learn and perhaps a little to unlearn. He leaves at the end of a course of instruction lasting for about eighteen months, furnished with a certificate from the professor of his chosen instrument, setting forth the degree of proficiency he has attained. If he has made a good use of his time, and shown real musical aptitude, he bears with him a further testimonial to the effect that he has studied Elementary Harmony and acquired some knowledge of Military Musical Instrumentation, and this latter certificate, which conveys to the commanding officer of the regiment the good opinion of Kneller Hall, may open the way for him, with due diligence on his part, to an eventual return to Kneller Hall, after he has attained the rank of band sergeant, for further training with a view to his qualifying for a band-mastership.

Kueller Hall itself takes its name from Sir Godfrey Kneller, the great portrait-painter of the age before Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose villa occupied the site of the present building, its position being indicated by a poet of the period :

To Whitton's shades and Hounslow's airy Plain.
Thou, Kneller, talk'st thy summer flights in vain.

In vain, that is, because the great world follows him to his retreat and crowds in to have its portrait taken. And if you should happen to visit Kneller Hall on some fine Wednesday afternoon in summer, you might think that Kneller's time had come back again. For from all directions there is a general concentration towards Kneller Hall: carriages of local residents, visitors from the railway stations, villagers and townspeople, are moving towards the Hall, while from among the rich verdure which surrounds everything rise the martial strains of the great Kneller Hall Band. It is a public reception at which all are welcome, with a band of perhaps one hundred and fifty performers, selected from the most promising pupils, and conducted

in turn by the advanced students, the bandmasters of the future.

Close by is the village of Whitton, with its forge, and tavern, and rural dwellings where many of the married students find quarters. And then the Hall itself appears, in the midst of its spacious grounds, some fifty acres in all, with cricket and football ground, meadows, shrubberies, and a pretty piece of ornamental water, with islands and grassy banks tenanted by all kinds of waterfowl, contributed from almost every region where the British drum sounds the reveillé. The Hall itself is of handsome, dignified aspect, in red brick, of the modified Italian style that found favour in the reign of James the First, with turrets and a good carved parapet of open stonework. The latter is of a friable sandstone which is already falling into decay, but it is such a pleasing feature of the façade that it will be a thousand pities if the Royal Engineers work their will on it, as is threatened, and block it up with bricks and cement.

Of the original building of Kneller's there is preserved a relic in the shape of the foundation stone inscribed with the artist's name, and the date of its being placed in position—1709, if memory serves—and there is also a stable of his time in the barrack-yard. The present building is of no earlier date than 1848, and was built as a training college for school-masters, with Dr. Temple, the present Bishop of London, for principal, but in 1857 was acquired by the War Office for its present purpose. It is conveniently supplied with class-rooms, but is in want of a large hall for concerted practice in inclement weather, where the full power of the band could be heard to advantage. Winding staircases of stone in the square brick turrets lead to the various floors of the Hall, and within, the long corridors and multitudinous doorways are replete with the cheerful bustle of coming and going, and the general movement of a large military establishment, all of which finds a focus in the Commandant's office. Here we shall find Colonel Shaw-Hellier, the Commandant—himself well known as a connoisseur in musical matters generally, and an especial authority in military music and musical instruments—and the Adjutant, Captain Mahony, busy with all the multifarious requirements of the administration of an establishment which combines the attributes of a garrison and a college, but able to spare half an hour to conduct

us through the various departments of the building, and to give us an outline of the general organisation.

First of all, the staff consists of Commandant and Adjutant, and a Director of Music, who has the control of the musical education of the students, and there are ten professors, each of whom takes one or more instruments, and who are nearly all eminent performers in their several lines. There are chaplains and schoolmasters, the latter for the advantage of the younger pupils who have not yet obtained their full educational certificates. The students have a capital mess, managed by their own committee, the cost of which per head does not exceed sevenpence a day, and the youngsters are liberally provided for at just half the cost to them—the free ration being, of course, added.

Work begins at nine o'clock in the morning, after, perhaps, bathing parades, running drill, or a march out, and lasts till six, with intervals for dinner and recreation. The evenings are devoted to voluntary study or practice with the string band, or to such diversions as may be in season. Saturday is, of course, a half-holiday, when cricket and football are in the ascendant. During the concert season in London the advanced students have the privilege of attending the best orchestral concerts, and every now and then the opera, so that they may be familiar with the best music of the day.

Already we have shown the youngsters en route for Kneller Hall, and now it remains to be seen how the aspirant for the position of bandmaster finds his way there. He must have had seven years' service as a musician and be a sergeant, or, at all events, a lance-sergeant, and then, under the recommendation of his commanding officer, he applies for admission to Kneller Hall. Upon that a set of sealed packets are forwarded to an officer appointed to superintend the examination, and the candidate "sits" accordingly at his own station, perhaps at Allahabad, perhaps at Aldershot, and discusses his packets from nine till noon on three successive days. The examination is stiff enough to plough a considerable number of candidates, but those who satisfy the examiners are directed to join the college.

Then comes a really arduous course of study in harmony, counterpoint, musical form, military and orchestral instrumentation, with a thorough training on all

instruments constituting a military and string band, on one at least of which he must be a skilled performer. In from two to three years the average student will have worked from class to class, will have obtained from each of the ten professors a certificate that he has sufficient knowledge of their respective instruments to be able to teach the same, and then with the goodwill of the Commandant and Director of Music, he sits again for a final examination by independent examiners selected from amongst the most eminent musicians in London, and if he passes, wins the "qualified form."

Once qualified, the student remains at Kneller Hall to await a vacancy on the roll of bandmasters, and occupies his time in further study, and in coaching the junior pupils, conducts the band in his turn during concerted practice, and scores or arranges instrumental music.

So far the student's energies have been quickened by the prospect of substantial advantages before him; but when he leaves Kneller Hall to take up the bandmastership of a regiment, he has reached the top of the tree, and there is only his interest in his art and professional zeal to keep him up to the mark. There is, however, a growing feeling in the profession that good service and proficiency should bring some reward, in the way of promotion and of higher relative rank. An accomplished musician and good bandmaster is surely qualified for commissioned rank; but with the exception of the bandmasters of two of the stationary bands—which comprise Guards, Artillery, Engineers, and Royal Marines—no such rank has been conferred on bandmasters, whatever their social and professional standing.

And now for a rapid glance at the internal features of the Hall. Here are class-rooms for the clarinet, for the horn and oboe; the euphonium and trombone make the windows tremble with their deep notes, to which the bassoon furnishes still a lower depth. Here is a lecture going on upon the theory of music, with current illustrations on the black-board; in another room the choir is practising for a coming festival. Urgent messages arrive from bandmasters who want performers, or from bands who want a conductor. Some are away to London for a rehearsal, others are returning; some, again, would be away on leave. With it all the music goes on, now in full force, again fining off to a single chord. There is a ruffle of drums,

perhaps, or again the clear notes of a cornet. But the students have a nice quiet room as library and study, where they may work, apart from the distractions of their own quarters; and the youngsters have a good recreation room where they can make a noise, play draughts or dominoes, or read in a corner a well-thumbed volume from the bookshelves.

Then there is the chapel, small, but handsome, with its organ loft and galleries filled on Sundays by a powerful choir. There is something like a musical service, you may imagine, where all are musicians, and a Sunday morning at Kneller Hall is an experience worth encountering; but there is not room for many besides the collegians.

There is the schoolroom, too, where some of the youngsters are going through the curriculum necessary to obtain a certificate, and where the black-board is full of posing questions in arithmetical subtleties. This schoolroom opens on the verandah that overlooks the lawn, where is the bandstand, solidly arranged for a hundred and fifty performers. Beyond that again are the red roofs of the new "married quarters"—for this is not a celibate college—where a dozen or so of the married students will find each a pleasant little home. At present the married ones have to get lodgings in the village, where the demand often exceeds the supply.

Looking at the value of the musical education given at Kneller Hall, it would seem that the career of a military musician offers considerable advantages to those with gifts and impulses of that nature. The bandmaster's position is a good one, and it rests with himself to make it equal in dignity to any other professional post, for an accomplished musician of polished manners is sure to take a high rank in social estimation, whatever his nominal army rank may be. At the end of twenty-one years' service, five of which must have been spent as bandmaster, when a comparatively young man, he may retire with a life pension of three-and-sixpence a day, and musical connections that ought to ensure him a good position as conductor of one of the numerous private bands or musical associations now so rife; and many retired bandmasters have attained a comfortable position as teachers and professors of music. There is a good deal of chance about the matter, perhaps, as far as regards the bandmaster's share of emoluments and distinc-

tion, and lean stations and fat ones fall to his lot irrespective of his talents and capacities. But it may be borne in mind that the career is safe if not brilliant, that it affords plenty of scope for talent and energy, and that good abilities will hardly go unrecognised—certainly not at Kneller Hall.

MERIVALE'S MASTERPIECE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"YES, and do you know, Farrell, you are about the last man I should ever have expected, at one time, to show me such kindness, or give me such generous encouragement."

"Have I encouraged you? Ah, well, that only proves how little one really knows one's friends."

And Farrell, the man addressed by George Merivale, the owner of the studio in which they were chatting, smiled in answer to the other's almost affectionate address.

"That is so; for, oddly enough, before you came out so well and in your true colours, I had the idea, or impression, or whatever you please to call it, that you disliked me rather than not."

"Ah, you always were fanciful, you know."

"Oh, that is all over, long ago, or I never should have told you, or—but you know all that, don't you?"

"Then why trouble to explain? If you know anything about me at all, you must own that I am not such a—I mean, not nearly so impressionable or imaginative as you," and the smile grew more pronounced than ever as the speaker went on: "But then each to his line. So long as you can turn your fancies to such account," and he pointed to the easel, "I for one shall be the very last to condemn either you or them."

"On the contrary, you have done nothing but admire."

"Admire is hardly the word, it does not express it. I am only sorry I have never been able to half do your picture justice."

"You think it is—tolerable, then?" queried the painter eagerly.

"Most tolerable, and not to be—you see into what pitfalls a habit of quoting may lead one. What I meant to say was that it is a truly remarkable work."

And the critic screwed up his fist through which to examine it the better.

"And you know why I am so terribly anxious, don't you? But of course you do,

for am I not always telling you? When everything—the desire of one's whole life, one's success in one's career, and above all, in love—all hang upon a thing, one may be forgiven for wishing to have one's own doubtful judgement confirmed. As to my own opinion, I should never place too much reliance on that. I am always in extremes. Sometimes I feel quite hopeful, and that it is really as you say—striking and original. But then at other times I have my doubts. When I wake up and come to it fresh in the morning, I am troubled with misgivings—but there, as you say again, I am full of fancies."

"You are indeed."

"Yes, I have been working rather too hard, I believe. But it will soon be finished and sent in, and then—why, then I can rest."

"And what do the other fellows think—or rather, what do they say? For it is difficult to get to know the real opinions of some people, as I dare say you know."

"Oh, none of them have been to see it lately. That is one thing that has made me uneasy, and led me rather to—to doubt, you know."

And Merivale glanced wistfully at his questioner.

"Don't you think you rely too much on the opinions of others, and not enough on your own? You see that it is good—quite the most daring thing you have ever painted, I think you said. Then why not hold by that, and let the rest go?"

"So I do try; but when so much—everything—depends on it, one's own judgement is so often biased and completely wrong."

"Candidly, Merivale, you are a—*a* queer fish. You are allowing this to have far too great an influence over you. Why, I do believe if anything were to happen—say that the picture were to turn out a—*a* mistake, a hopeless and ridiculous failure—I really believe—"

"Oh, hush, Farrell! don't suggest anything so horrible!"

"Well, my dear fellow, it was only a suggestion, caused by your own—but you are going a long way towards proving the truth of my words. You look quite white and ill. You really must take care."

"I cannot take anything until this weight is off my mind. And if it were to—to turn out as you suggest, I—I believe it would be the death of me outright." And throwing down his palette and brushes the painter paced hurriedly about

the room, while the other watched him narrowly through his half closed eyes, as he finished in still greater agitation:

"Thanks to you and your suggestion, I have risked everything on this."

"Nay, nay, Merivale, I protest. Don't throw all the weight on me. It is true when first you mentioned your idea for the competition to me I did say, 'Why not go in?' but I never meant it—seriously that is; while as to recommending you to throw up all your other work, and neglect all your commissions, I never should have ventured to advise anything so—"

"Mad—no, perhaps not. But I am in it now; have staked all on this one throw, and—you know you did admire the first sketch I showed you." This was said with a return of anxiety.

"I told you you had got hold of a wonderful idea—startling and original, I believe I said—and I have never seen any reason to change my opinion since; which was your own, if you remember, at the time. So why not rest satisfied with that? Stick by your first impressions and send it in. You will learn all about it, from the critics, then."

"Well, I will. I must believe; merely to doubt is too horrible! Besides, I have felt all through as though I were inspired. Except, that is, at these dreadful seasons of depression; which seize upon and shake me until I—but, as you say, I will trust to my first impressions and to—to you. You should know—while for the rest, no one has seen it for months, during which I have slaved at it early and late, and let everything else go."

"And Eurydice, Miss Earnshaw—"

"Has been away. She, too, has never seen it since the first outline. But to-day she is coming to give me one more sitting for the final touches, and—"

"You will let her see it?"

"You—you think she will be pleased?" urged the painter doubtfully.

"My dear fellow, she will be surprised; I feel confident of that. And now take my advice. You are worn out and terribly excited. Take a dose of chloral, or bromide, or whatever that stuff is the doctor gave you, and have a rest. You will be worth ever so much more when you awake."

"Do you think so?"

"And bear in mind what Sir Joshua, or one of those fellows, said—I forget where I read it now—about broadening your effects. It must be done for exhibi-

tion pictures. What do you think of that carmine—is it deep enough, do you consider? The eyes, too—would not a trifle of depth—above all the smile—it must be no mere dimple, or curl of the lip; but, of course, you will see and decide all that for yourself, I dare say; I may be quite wrong."

"No, you are right, as you always are; I can see it now. I will just go over it again, and then, after an hour or so's work, lie down. I shall look and feel less tired when Mabel comes to see me this afternoon."

"Well, I'll be off and leave you to it. Who the deuce— Oh! here's that fellow Eversleigh coming. He will not care about seeing me, we were never the best of friends. But I thought he was away—abroad."

"So he was; the wonder is to see him now. Back just in time, too; I am pleased. I was afraid it would all have been over before; but now, next to Mabel there is no one I—"

"Do you mean you are going to show him—this?"

"Why not? He is my very oldest, closest friend."

"Oh! please yourself of course. Only, were I you—after the way some of your other friends have behaved, and all that—"

"But Eversleigh is—"

"Candour itself, no doubt. Still, I would learn first whether he is going in himself. One never knows. Time enough to show him—if you must—after that."

"You—you think so?"

"I'm sure so. In some things you really are little better than a child. Don't you see it for yourself?"

"Well, perhaps you are right; though I should as soon have thought of doubting—but maybe you are right."

And with that, after repeating: "Why, of course, it's only common-sense. It is far too late to profit by any suggestion he might make, so you just keep the curtain down. He'll see it on view, and—but I must be off. I don't wish to meet him here," Farrell had gone hurriedly away.

Hardly had he got clear of the side door, than Eversleigh, the "oldest, closest friend," came in at the front, and after the first awkwardness of "welcoming the coming," with the warning words of the "parting" guest still sounding in his ears, Merivale gradually thawed and relapsed into the old intimate relations. While

Eversleigh, after one quick glance at his friend's face, and then at the signs of disorder and neglect about the studio, began to talk:

"Well, and what have you been doing all this long time? Too busy to write, eh?"

"Yes, too busy, and too—shall I say absorbed? Both, I think," laughed the other nervously, with a trace of the awkwardness of doubt still lingering about him.

"You seem a trifle 'fey' even now. How, or what, is it?—if that is a fair question."

"Why, you must know, or, rather, you do know, that I am very much in love."

"Quite so; so much you did send me word. And how fares the tender passion?"

"In some respects well, nothing could be better, but—"

"Oh! there are buts."

"That goes without saying, does it not?" and again the laugh sounded nervous and constrained before he finished.

"It is part of the usual probation, and of—the whole story, in short."

"Well, fire away—unless, by the way, I am not to hear it," returned Eversleigh with another swift and keenly observant glance.

"Oh! you shall hear all there is to tell. Of course you know all about the great competition?"

"Certainly; though I don't quite see—"

"Possibly not, but you will when you hear that I am sending in."

Eversleigh's face changed a little, in spite of himself, as he answered:

"What, you, a landscape man, go in for—"

"Oh, I knew what you would say, but I—I—call me a fool if you will; but it was borne in upon me that—in short, I had what I thought was an inspiration by way of an idea."

"But the subject, for you, don't you think, is insuperably difficult? You know I always advised you to—"

"Stick to what you thought my line. I know, and possibly I should have done so but for—"

He hesitated, while his friend interposed anxiously, but with an encouraging smile:

"Well?"

"But for my idea. Say that I was infatuated, possessed, or what you will."

"I can't say that until I have seen the idea."

"But I mean thoroughly possessed with the subject and the desire to work it out."

"Oh, there is no particular harm in that, always providing——"

"It is no use, Eversleigh. I may have been a fool. I hardly know yet; but I have staked all upon this one throw—have given up everything else for it—all my commissions and my other work. Not only that, Mabel agreed to sit for the principal figure, and I think that her doing so inspired me; while work—oh, how I have worked, and what agonies of alternate desire and despondency I have endured! As an artist, you may have some idea, and, anyhow, you are the only one I can tell, except—yes, of course—except Farrell."

"Farrell; what of him? I always did detest that man." This came quickly. "And——"

"That is because you do not know him," objected the other.

"Say rather because I do. But what of him? What could he have to say or do in the affair? I thought——"

"That we were rivals. So we were, until he showed himself my friend. I don't know why we should have both so misjudged him; but from the very hour that Mabel assured him he had no chance, he changed, and although he has never made any open professions of goodwill, I suppose he yielded to the inevitable, for he gave up all that sneering way he had, and he has stood by and encouraged me when all the others fell away. In fact, but for him, I never should have gone in, much less stuck to it, as I have done."

"And the others fell away. What, Darcy and Redmond, and——"

"All of them, to a man. Of late they have left me altogether alone."

"And for what reason?"

"None that I have ever heard. Farrell says they must be jealous, but that you know I can't believe. It is making too much of one's self altogether to think that."

"No, I would not even think it without——" Eversleigh stopped awkwardly.

"And so Farrell thinks your idea good, eh?" he enquired next.

"He has nothing but praise for it. It is both striking and original. I am quoting his own words, and——"

"He should know, if any one does. He will never paint anything worth talking about, because he won't work; but to give him his due, he is a fair critic—though how on earth——"

"You may well be surprised. I wonder at myself sometimes."

"My dear fellow, it is not your talent, or invention, that I doubt, but merely your technical skill. Suppose you show me this masterpiece of yours," and he laid his hand on the curtain which was drawn jealously before the easel.

"Not yet—not just yet, Eversleigh. You see, Mabel is coming this afternoon, and I—the fact is, she must be the first to see it."

"Except Farrell," interposed his friend with a very pardonable heat, a natural jealousy that was quickly lost in sincere pity as he noticed his friend's wasted features and nervous, unsteady eye. "So, then," he asked, "Mabel has not yet seen it?"

"Not yet. To-day it is to be shown to her for the first time."

"And what else have you been doing?"

"I told you I gave up everything for this."

"But your commissions, what of them? Surely—was that wise?"

"I cannot tell. Looking back, I have my doubts. Truly, Eversleigh, for the last twelve months I seem to have been in one long troubled dream. I only hope I shall not wake to find——" he broke off with a sudden gasp and an involuntary shudder.

"Well, well, we must hope for the best—though I wish I had been here," Eversleigh murmured to himself, "before he wasted a twelvemonth of valuable time, just, too, at the outset of his career, when he was doing so well and getting known. Unless, indeed, he is right after all, and the love fever has brought him the touch of genius that makes up for the rest. One has heard of such things, whether fever, or madness—and he is feverish enough, goodness knows! The wonder is he has not broken down long ago. You had better lie down and have a sleep as you agreed," he went on aloud; "I have one or two calls to make, and will come back in a couple of hours and see both the picture and its fair inspirer."

"All right, do so, for I really am tired; I hardly know what has come over me of late. Such a strange languor, and—but I will have a dose of chloral, as Farrell suggested."

"Oh! Farrell suggested that too, did he?" murmured Eversleigh, then aloud: "Look here, Merivale, you take my advice. You lie down and rest, and sleep if you can, but

without any of those infernal brain-disturbing drugs, I——"

"There, there, don't excite yourself. It's quite harmless, I assure you. I could not have kept up without; but there, since you make a point of it, I will try to do without. I shall be all the fresher to meet Mabel if only I can sleep."

They parted, Merivale to go to bed, where, after tossing about for a while, he sank into a heavy slumber; and Eversleigh, full of anxiety for his friend, to walk about the park and think matters over.

Two hours later he returned to the studio in a more hopeful frame of mind. True, Merivale was worn out and unnaturally excited, but overwork would account for that; while, as for his own doubts, he found they rested for the most part on his dislike and distrust of Farrell, and his disbelief in the goodness and singleness of his motives. What they could be he was unable to fathom, but certainly it was a sudden and, for him, most marvellous change from unsuccessful rival to confidential friend and adviser, and the situation required an unsuspicious mind such as Merivale's entirely to accept. Still, Merivale had had opportunities of judging that he, Eversleigh, had not, and he must hope for the best.

And full of curiosity he brushed past a lady, who, with bent head and down-dropped veil, hurried by him as he neared the door.

"Miss Earnshaw, I wanted so much to——" he began; but she was gone, and either had not heard or would not hear him, and there was nothing for it but to ring the bell.

Some little time elapsed before it was answered, and when he was shown into the studio he was alarmed more even than before by Merivale's wild and distracted air. He was standing reading a note, and his staring eyes and white face spoke of some terribly strong emotion.

"Oh, thank Heaven you are here, to tell me whether I am awake and sane or still dreaming," he exclaimed violently, then sank into a chair as he went on. "Oh, I have had the most horrible dream, and a still more horrible awakening. What can it all mean? It is cruel, heartless, to leave me without a word of explanation, nothing but this," and he dashed the note he was still holding down. "Yes, read it, by all means, for I can make nothing of it."

And thus bidden Eversleigh read—only a very few words, but they left him more

troubled than ever. This is what he read:

"If that is how I look in your eyes, the less we see of each other for the future the better."

That was all; no signature, no regrets, no farewell. But, of course, it was from Mabel; he recognised the hand, and puzzled as he was, he was about to test his first idea when his friend's voice arrested him.

"No, not yet," he urged hoarsely; "don't go to it—yet. Wait, wait while I tell you my dream. Instead of the bright creation of my fancy that for months past has gladdened my eyes and grown underneath my hand, I dreamt I stood before the picture and saw——" a groan broke from him, and he shook as with an ague, while he tried vainly to go on. "Oh, I can see it still. It is here—here!" he repeated wildly, as he struck his forehead violently with his open hand. "A painted, grinning horror, with eyes—oh, Heaven, what eyes! And this was the thing I had loved and had bound myself to for life. And, at the sight, all my love was lost in loathing, and, in the awfulness of the reaction, I awoke—woke to find—this;" and he struck the open note with his foot where it lay. "And, oh, the nightmare horror of it! I could see the likeness through it all, as though Mabel, transformed into a veritable fiend, were mocking me. And now, Frank, look—look at what I have done yourself. I dare not trust my eyes, not though they were to show me Mabel's very self, while to face that jeering mockery again, I think, would shivel up my brain."

Eversleigh hesitated for a moment; but what could he say? So, going to the curtain, he drew it quietly aside to straightway stand amazed.

For at the first glance he saw that something was seriously wrong. Whether brain, or eyes, or both, had been affected by the excitement and the long-continued strain, was not to be decided off-hand, but he realised, as with a lightning flash, the full refinement and ingenuity of Farrell's cruel scheme, and how he had turned the very truth itself to his own unworthy ends. For, stripped of its surface faults—and he, an artist, could see the true grandeur and simplicity of his friend's conception—it was, indeed, as Farrell had said "striking, daring, and original." Oh! what could he not have made of it himself? came the involuntary thought; while with it came also the full perception of where the pic-

ture failed—though failed was hardly the word, for the whole working out was so utterly wrong in colour, and, above all, in expression, that the thing stood forth more as a magnificent caricature than a serious work of art. And there, as he felt, would lie the sting. It could not well be overlooked, or fail of making a sensation, if only from its frightfully ingenious perversion.

For a moment he was in doubt. Could Merivale have meant it as an ill-timed jest, an attempt to turn the whole competition into ridicule? But no; he had only to remember the very real trouble of his friend's looks and words to dismiss that idea at once, and wonder what on earth he was to say. To tell him the truth, or, at any rate, the whole of it, in his present critical state, would, to say the least, be assuming a very serious responsibility, while to appear to side with Farrell and deceive the unfortunate painter still further might in the end prove still more disastrous. There was no help for it. He must temporise, at all hazards.

"Well," enquired the artist anxiously, "What is it like?"

"My dear fellow, I see clearly how it is. You have run the mill too long. You have strained both eyes and brain until now you cannot look at your own work without—fancying—distortion. Take my advice, and rest. Rest and change, fresh air and exercise, are what you need and must have, unless you wish to end your days at Colney Hatch. Try my prescription. Go away, say for a week, and then if you like to come to it again, why, I for one will not prevent you. Come, what do you say?"

"But the time, Eversleigh, the time. How can I afford the time? You see the sacrifices I have made, and how everything—reputation, nay, come to that, after twelve months, even bread and butter—depends upon my making a reasonable show; while how I am to be reconciled to Mabel, when I have no idea of my crime—Oh, everything is going wrong at once!"

Whereupon the miserable artist groaned and turned so white, that Eversleigh promptly rang the bell and sent for the nearest doctor.

Mabel meanwhile had left the house in ignorance of her lover's state, but in fully as much trouble as himself.

Shown into the studio when she called, and left to herself, being duly authorised on that day to satisfy her curiosity, she

had taken the opportunity to have a "quiet peep" at the expected masterpiece, and could scarcely credit the evidence of her own eyes. Still, there it was—a loud, staring, over-coloured, fatuously smiling horror—her lover's version of herself, and as such soon to be given to the world. Oh, it was too dreadful to contemplate calmly! While as to seeing him, the perpetrator of this outrage, this deliberately planned and carefully executed insult, which was so motiveless, unless it were intended to hold her up to the ridicule of all her friends—why, she felt she could never care to see him again. And, full of righteous wrath, she had written her farewell note, and left the studio fully intending never to return.

It so happened, however, that Farrell, bent on mischief, was on the watch for her appearance. Not so easily avoided as Eversleigh, he ignored her too evident annoyance, and persisted in walking her way; at last:

"Is anything the matter, Miss Earnshaw? You seem annoyed," he asked.

"If I said I am annoyed, and with you, Mr. Farrell, would it make any difference—to you, I mean?" she rejoined with marked displeasure, for her previous hints had been unmistakably disregarded.

"Annoyed, and with me?" he repeated, somewhat startled in his turn; for that she should so promptly have found out his share in the transaction was hardly what he had expected.

"Yes, can you not see that I wish to be alone?" she returned coldly.

"Oh! yes, that is all right," he assented easily, for now he knew on what ground he stood; while she, thoroughly provoked, looked at him in undisguised astonishment.

"Then do you no longer pretend to be a gentleman?" she flashed back with a cutting contempt that made him wince in spite of his secret consciousness of the full success of his revenge.

"Ah! you are indeed annoyed; but not, I think, with me." And, mistakenly, he went on to take advantage of what he thought the opening. "You have seen Merivale's masterpiece at last; what do you think of it?"

"What I think cannot possibly concern you," she replied coldly. "And if you will allow me, I will get into a cab."

"I should have thought——" then growing desperate as she deliberately turned her back: "Can't you see," he added, "that he

is going mad?" thereby throwing a new light upon the subject, and startling her very much indeed.

"Mad?" she echoed, for the suggestion, dreadful though it was, accounted for so many things.

"Why, would any sane man have so perverted—that?"

They were standing opposite a shop window, and he pointed to where a mirror gave back Mabel's full-length reflection in striking contrast to the counterfeit presentment she had just left.

Evidently she was moved by the suggestion, thought he, though he had not meant to say anything so near the truth; however, he must follow it up.

"Either that or he drinks, or takes some drug. What it is I can't quite make out, but nothing short of that would explain——"

But he had lost his head and gone too far. Mabel heard the lurking malice latent in his tone. She remembered what had passed and all that Merivale had told her of the supposed advice and encouragement given him by his friend, and with a woman's ready intuition she felt there was something wrong, and that the man before her was in some unexplained way the cause. So, without a word or sign, she stepped into the waiting cab—to bid the man drive her back to the studio as soon as they were fairly out of sight.

And fortunate it was for her and her lover both that she did so.

When she arrived the doctor had put Merivale to bed, where, with head shaved and plenty of ice he hoped to stave off the threatened brain fever. He must be kept quiet and see no one, nor be disturbed for any consideration whatsoever.

Such was Eversleigh's news when they met in the deserted studio, where all uncovered and unregarded stood the fatal masterpiece, the cause of all their present woes. Eversleigh, having finished his explanation, caught sight of it presently, and wishing to spare Mabel the sight, went once more to draw the curtain.

"No, let me look at it again," she urged. "I can bear it now that I know he is not in any way to blame." Then, as she began to piece the threads together, she exclaimed: "Oh, what an infamous plot! It is all his doing."

"You mean Farrell's? Yes, I have come to the same conclusion. Seeing the pitiable state to which overwork and anxiety had reduced him, he has worked upon Merivale and spurred him on by his artful

suggestions until—this is the result. A noble idea spoiled."

"A noble idea! Why, do you mean that it is good?" cried Mabel in amazement; for she had not seen below the surface even yet.

"It is a magnificent subject, and if it were properly treated—— Oh, that I had had the chance to paint it!"

"Then why not do it?" And Mabel spoke as one inspired, her ignorance of petty details giving her the necessary courage; and as the artist looked back at her in surprise: "George is not to blame; you see that, now, do you not? He is a victim to over-anxiety and—his friend. I don't know how you feel, but I would do anything to see the schemer foiled. What do you say? Suppose I sit again and——"

"By Jove! Miss Earnshaw, you have hit on a really great idea. I must confess I never dreamt of that. There is nothing I should like better; here is all the material ready to our hands. If you will give the time, a very little trouble would effect a revolution; and I should dearly like to turn the laugh against that scoundrel Farrell. What do you say, then? If you are ready, so am I."

And straightway was the bargain struck, and while Merivale, carefully nursed, lay ill in bed, under the skilful touches of his friend his picture was rapidly transformed into all he had ever dreamed of it, and more. And it was one of the finest sights they had ever enjoyed, when Eversleigh and Mabel together confronted the arch plotter Farrell and saw his discomfiture before the winner of the Great National Competition. While for the poor victim, no sooner was he able to hear that and the other good news—that their estrangement had been all a mistake—from Mabel, than he quickly got well enough to hear the rest and learn how it had all been brought about.

MARA.

A STORY IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

EIGHT months had gone by, and Mara declared laughingly that she and Desmond were quite old married people, for their marriage had taken place after only a month's engagement. Perhaps for both of

them those months had been the happiest in their lives. Desmond's days had passed in one long dream of bliss, for Mara was very loving to him in that early time of their marriage. She, too, was happy, with the pleased, gratified happiness of a selfish person who has attained the object of desire, and is perfectly satisfied with the world in general, and while the satisfaction lasted, how could she help showing her best and most charming side to the husband through whom she had gained her enjoyment?

And, besides, at first she was very proud of him; his talents, the honour and respect that men paid him, all gratified her vanity as she thought that he had chosen her from all other women to be his wife.

He had taken her home to Longford, and there, for a time, Mara was charmed with everything, most of all, perhaps, with the position she found awaiting her, for Desmond was one of the chief men in the place, and his beautiful wife was universally petted and made much of. Then, too, the freedom from money worries was utterly new and delightful; in all her life before, Mara had never known how to get even a new dress without scheming and manoeuvring for it, while now Desmond's chief delight seemed to be in showering presents of all sorts upon her.

But all things were apt to pall on Mara after a time, and she began to weary for some change. She was one of those people whose test for everything and every one is novelty; when that has worn off, the value soon follows suit. She had no belief whatever in "that sweet monotony where everything is known and loved because it is known." Even Desmond's passionate devotion began to tire her, and the task of responding to it and keeping up the pretence of love, grew difficult.

She was thinking more discontentedly than usual one night, longing more than ever for some break in the monotony. Desmond had been obliged to go some distance on business at a far-off police station, and Mara, as she often did, had accompanied him. At first, these expeditions had delighted her—the long ride; the arrival at the little village, where all the inhabitants turned out to stare at them; the clean, white-washed barrack-room, where she waited while Desmond did his business; the ride home, generally at night when the moonlight threw ghostly shadows on the trees and hedges, till Mara

edged fearfully nearer her husband, visions of masked men and moonlighters coming to her mind; all had seemed like some weird fairy-tale. But even that she had grown used to, and she was only wishing, as she sat before the fire, that Desmond would be quick and not make them so late as usual. Why need he always want her to come with him, and take it for granted that she liked his company as well as he did hers?

A step echoed outside, and Mara jumped up hastily. But it was not Desmond who came into the room, shielding his eyes from the light, having only just entered from the dark outside. It was a much younger man, tall and fair, and, as Mara instantly decided, even better-looking than Desmond.

He took off his cap as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, and he saw that the room was not empty.

"I beg your pardon, I had no idea that any one was here."

"Pray don't apologise," said Mara. "I shall not be here long, I hope; I am only waiting for my husband."

"Oh," said the stranger, "then will you allow me to wait here? The girth of my saddle broke, and I came here to see if they could patch it up. I am going on to Longford."

"Are you?" cried Mara, wondering who he could be. "We live in Longford, too."

"Then we must be neighbours. Will you let me introduce myself to you? My name is Frank Warden."

"You are the gentleman who owns that big house just outside the town—I forget its name—are you not? My husband told me that a Mr. Warden used to live there, but he had been away for a long time."

"Yes, I have been away for a long time now: eighteen months it must be. To tell the truth I am not very fond of Ireland. But won't you tell me to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

"I am Mrs. Blake. I am sure you and my husband know each other."

"Yes, I know him very well; but—excuse me, I was not aware he had married," added Warden, as he looked admiringly at the beautiful woman before him.

Mara laughed.

"I dare say you have not heard it. We were only married a few months ago. Here he is."

The door opened and Desmond entered. "I've been an awful time, darling, but—Hullo! why, Warden! I hardly

knew you. How on earth did you turn up here?"

"I dropped in on my way home," said Warden, shaking hands cordially. "Neither did I expect to meet you here."

"I dare say you and my wife have introduced each other," went on Desmond. "You see I've turned Benedick since we met last," with a proud look towards his wife.

"With such an excuse we would all follow your example to-morrow," said Warden, smiling. "Have you got over your business here?"

Desmond's face clouded.

"No, hang it all! That's what I came to tell you, Mara. I'm awfully sorry, but I must go out again at once; there's a row of some kind a few miles off, so they have just brought me word. I can't possibly be back before morning. I am vexed about it, dear," he added in a low voice, while Warden turned away. "I don't know what to do with you. You couldn't stay here for the night, could you? The sergeant's wife would fix you up all right."

"Oh, Desmond, I really couldn't! Just think how uncomfortable it would be. Can't I come with you?"

"My darling, no! There may be rough work—most probably will—and I must be in the thick of it. What could you do? No; won't you stay here?"

Mara pouted. "You know I don't want to, Desmond. Why did you want me to come if you knew you would have to go off like this? It was unkind!"

"But I never had any idea of it!" protested poor Desmond. "It really isn't my fault, Mara."

"Can I be of any use?" asked Warden, suddenly. "Excuse me for interfering, Blake, but as you are wanted, perhaps I could escort Mrs. Blake home."

"The very thing!" cried Desmond, much relieved. "Will you do that, Mara? If Warden will be so good as to see you safe home, that will be all right."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Warden," said Mara. "That will do capitally, Desmond. Are the horses ready?"

"I'll go and see," and Warden left the room.

Desmond turned to her when they were alone, and began to fasten up the short cloak she wore over her habit at night.

"Don't be angry with me, darling. I am awfully sorry I can't go with you. I couldn't possibly foresee having to go off like this."

Mara smiled up at him in her brightest way. "You old goose," she whispered. "When am I ever angry with you? I know that you would much rather come with me than go anywhere else."

He held her closely in his arms, and kissed her passionately. "I would rather die with you than live without you."

"Silly boy! No one wants you to do either; you have only got to live with me. And now let me go, dear; I am sure the horses must be waiting. Good-bye!"

And in a few minutes she was trotting steadily along the silent road, with Warden's fine chestnut keeping pace with her.

"Do you often come with your husband like this?" asked he presently.

"Very often, nearly always. He always wants to drag me about with him everywhere."

"Don't you like these moonlight expeditions, then?"

"Well, I suppose I am tired of them," confessed she frankly. "I used to think them great fun at first, but I am used to them now."

"Then you never like anything you are used to?"

"Not very often," said Mara, laughing. "You think that very shocking, I am sure."

"No, indeed, I don't," protested Warden. "On the contrary, I quite agree with you. I don't like getting used to things myself."

"Are you going to make a long stay here?"

"Well, I didn't intend to. I only came really to look up my agent, who isn't doing as well as he might."

"You don't like Longford, I suppose, as you spend so little time here?"

"Not very much. I generally find it slow after a time, and am pretty glad to get off to London or the Continent."

Mara listened, envying him his powers of getting away to London and the Continent. She knew that he was very rich, this young man. Desmond had often told her stories of his various extravagances both at home and abroad, but he always ended up with: "Lucky young dog! He can afford to sow plenty of wild oats with such a fortune as he's got." She had often been interested in him, and it was no wonder that now she hailed this fresh acquaintance as a welcome change, and during their long ride made herself as pleasant as she knew how to be.

"Are we really at the end of our ride?" cried Warden regretfully, as Mara checked her horse at the gates of her home. "It has been only too short, Mrs. Blake."

"We have not come very quickly either," said Mara. "I am afraid this really is the end, Mr. Warden. I will say good night, and many thanks. But for you, I should now be dismally awaiting Desmond in that horrid little barrack-room."

"The thanks are due from me," said Warden, as he unfastened the gates to let her pass through. "May I come to see you soon, then?"

"Yes, if you like. But you said you would not stay here long."

He laughed merrily.

"Oh, I don't know about that. Anyhow, I shall come soon."

Mara gave her horse into the hands of the sleepy groom, and went upstairs to her room. She looked at herself in the glass, and smiled with gratified vanity.

"H'm! I don't fancy, after all, he will go away very soon. And he is awfully good-looking."

She was right! Warden did not go away as he had meant to do. Before a month had passed he was at Mara's feet, the slave of her smallest caprice—at one moment teased and mocked at, the next cajoled and petted, and again treated with an airy indifference that well-nigh drove him wild. He loathed his slavery even when he most felt the charm of it; he hated the deceit it involved; at times the touch of Desmond's hand and the sound of his voice were almost more than he could bear; but yet her power over him was so great that he could not leave her. How he had begun to love her, when the first friendship and admiration began to merge into something different, he could not have told. He had never told her of his love—she had never allowed him to do so—but all the same he knew well that she was aware of it, and that though she did not encourage, she permitted it.

CHAPTER IV.

"MARA, I've some news for you," said Blake, coming suddenly into the drawing-room one morning, where his wife was standing in her riding-habit. She was waiting for Warden; it was an almost daily occurrence for them to ride together.

"What is it?" she asked listlessly. "Really news, Desmond? Is it interesting?"

"I find it somewhat interesting; I don't know whether you will. Do you remember that murder case I told you of not long ago, that took place down in Kerry?"

"No, I'm not very sure. Ob, yes, I do! The murder of an old man and his two sons. Is it found out?"

"No, the dolts have blundered again, as they invariably do!" cried Desmond, pacing the room excitedly. "I told them all along they were trying the wrong tack. And now, when they have got affairs into a most inextricable state of confusion, and given the fellows who did it ample time to make off, or at least to obliterate every trace of their guilt, they propose to resign the case to me! Why, if they give me a case, they can't let me manage it my own way from the beginning, I can't imagine! The local men always fail in any complicated case, and they always blunder and fool about and make things fifty times harder for me when I take matters in hand."

"Shall you go?" asked Mara, not feeling called upon to respond to this tirade.

Desmond stopped in his pacing opposite to her, and parried her question with another:

"Will you come with me?"

Mara started in evident surprise:

"I, Desmond! Down to Kerry! Isn't it an awfully wild place?"

"Well, it's not the most peaceable of districts, certainly," he answered, smiling; "but it would at least have the charm of novelty. Come with me, dear," he went on persuasively. "It will be a long business, and I can't go alone. Should you mind it very much?"

Mara did not answer, she was looking out of the window, from which she could see the distant road. Coming along on horseback was a figure she knew well even so far off. What would Warden say? If she went, would he follow her?

"But the people," she said. "Aren't they very wild, Desmond? I should be afraid of them."

"Do you think I should let you go if I thought you would be in one moment's danger? But I won't urge you; it shall be as you please."

"Do you mean to go?"

"I must, darling," he answered. "I never shirked any work in my life, and I can't begin now."

"Do you want me to come?" she questioned.

"When do I not want you? Will you, darling? I shall be so wretched alone."

Mara looked at him closely, and for a moment a feeling of compunction seized her. How good he had always been to her, and how he loved and trusted her, and what had she ever given him in exchange! She made up her mind to go with him. Sooner or later the knowledge of her real character must come to him; let her make him happy while she could.

"I will go, Desmond," she cried; "so you need not go alone."

"That's my own wife," said Desmond, in much relief. "Hang it! Here's that fellow Warden! He's always about now. Are you going to ride with him, Mara?"

"Yes, dear; I wish you could come, too, but I suppose you're too busy, as usual," said Mara, gathering up her skirt and going out to the hall door.

Desmond put her into her saddle, and went back to his study with a half sigh. Somehow his wife seemed very little with him of late. And he thought with some satisfaction that down in Kerry he would have her all to himself.

Meanwhile Mara was calmly enjoying her ride. She meant to tell Warden of their going to Kerry some time before they parted, and he gave her an opening as they were slowly walking homewards.

"Well, when will you come out again with me—to-morrow?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't manage it," said Mara. "We are going away in a day or two, Desmond and I, and I shall be very busy packing up."

"Going away?" cried he in astonishment. "But where? You won't go for long?"

"That depends on what you call long. We are going to Kerry on some case of Desmond's. He says it will take some months."

"Months!" repeated Warden. Then he came close and seized her hand. "Do you imagine I am going to be without you for months, or even one month? Don't go, stay here!"

Mara shook her head.

"I must go. And what right have you got to express any interest in my movements, Mr. Warden?"

"The right you have given me when all through these last weeks you have let me be with you in the full consciousness that I loved you as I ought never to have loved any married woman. Don't deny it, Mara. I love you madly, and you know I do."

"Oh, how can you say such dreadful things?" cried Mara. "How could I possibly know anything of the kind?"

Warden laughed bitterly.

"How do people know these things? Was there ever a woman yet who didn't know when she was loved? Mara, I have broken the ice now, and taken the plunge. Sometimes I have thought that you cared for me just a little. Is it possible?"

"I will not hear any more at all," said Mara. "You are really most shocking, Mr. Warden. I don't think I will ever speak to you again. Good-bye!"

She touched her horse with the whip, but Warden gripped her hand.

"You shall not go like this! Do you think I am going to be played with and cast off, after having been fool enough to love you as I do? I will see you again, Mara! Tell me where and when?"

Mara saw that in his present mood she could not trifle with him.

"Well, perhaps you may come and call to-morrow afternoon; but mind, you must not say anything about what you have told me to-day. I shall be dreadfully angry if you do."

A few days afterwards she and her husband were trying to settle down in Kerry. It was no light or unobtrusive task that Desmond Blake had undertaken, as he well knew, this unravelling of a mystery that had baffled the local police. He had need of all his penetration, all his courage, all his strength, mental and bodily; for in that wild district where the murder had been committed, all the people, either from choice or fear, were leagued against him. He knew that, though the full details of the crime were probably known to many besides the perpetrators, even to friends and relations of the victims, yet not one of them would dare to give his testimony truly, knowing that if he broke the oath of silence that had been imposed upon him, his life would pay the penalty. And Desmond was well aware, too, that he must beware of his own life, for any one of those wild, desperate men would think it his duty to kill him who had come to bring some of them to justice.

The days passed on; spring ripened into a glorious, warm summer, and slowly but surely Blake's almost infallible penetration was solving the mystery of the case he was engaged on, and every day was wrapping the web of circumstantial evidence more remorselessly round the perpetrators of the

crime. And day by day resentment, passionate hatred, sick fear, grew and swelled in the hearts of those men whose bitterest enemy he was: day by day the determination increased to stop this daring inquisition that was going on, by fair means or foul! Very soon came the question: should they die ignobly at the hangman's hands through Blake's instrumentality, or should he perish by their means before he could finish that carefully woven net of evidence?

Blake was riding with his wife one day, returning from a long expedition to the mountains, where Mara had capriciously expressed a desire to go. They were riding slowly, for she was tired; Pat—Desmond's servant, a man who had been with him ever since he had been able to afford one—and a couple of policemen following them at a short distance.

"And so the case is nearly ended, Desmond," Mara was saying joyfully. "Have you quite found out the murderers?"

"To my own satisfaction; but I haven't quite all the evidence. I mean that I have enough to show me that I am right, but not sufficient for a law court. But the missing link is close to my hand, and will soon join the whole together."

"How much longer will you be, then?"

"Can't tell, darling. Not very long, I expect. Are you getting tired of it?"

"Very," confessed she. "You see, there is nothing to do here, Desmond."

"Poor little martyr to a selfish husband, whom destiny has made a detective of! Never mind, dear, you won't be here much longer, and then I'll take you away somewhere."

"Will you really?" said Mara absently. She did not seem so delighted at the prospect as her husband had expected.

"Do you like this kind of work, Desmond?" she questioned presently.

"I do, and I don't," said Desmond slowly. "I believe I was born to do it, I can do it well, and therefore I suppose I find it agreeable and absorbing when I'm engaged in it. But sometimes it seems an awful thing to track out and hunt down men to punish them for crimes that I'd have done myself, more than likely, had I been similarly placed. I hate to think of the number of men who have met their death through me."

"How strange!" said Mara wonderingly. "I should have thought you would be proud of your success, and of the many dreadful men you have brought to justice."

Desmond shook his head gravely.

"You don't know what death is, Mara; how awful, how vast in its eternal mystery for us all, and above all for those men who face it steeped in crime. I often think——"

The sentence was never finished, for a shot echoed through the still calm of the evening, and Blake suddenly reeled forward in his saddle, and fell heavily on his horse's neck. Mara's heart almost stopped beating in deadly fear—fear for her own safety, not for the husband, who, for all she knew, was lying dead across his horse. She looked round her wildly for aid. Pat and the policemen were galloping towards her, startled by the shot. To her left a man's figure was speeding away, half crouching among the bushes; and close at her side stood Desmond's motionless horse, bearing its unconscious burden. She heard as if in a dream Pat's despairing cry as he sprang to the ground; she watched the men tenderly lift her husband from his saddle and lay him down on the grass at the side of the road, and still never moved from her horse till one of the policemen roused her by asking if she had seen any one, or could tell where the shot had come from. She saw him start with his comrade in pursuit in the direction she pointed out, bidding Pat wait till they returned to help carry "the master." Then she looked at the still form on the grass, and for the first time a fear lest he should be dead came into her mind.

"Pat, he is not dead?" she gasped.

"He is not, ma'am. But he is greatly hurt. He's coming round now, ma'am."

"Pat, what's the matter?" came in Desmond's voice, strangely weak and faint.

"Where am I? And my wife; she is safe?"

"She is, sir," and Pat glanced up with an almost imperative gesture to his mistress.

She obeyed it, slipped off her horse, and came and knelt at her husband's side.

"I am here, Desmond. Are you badly hurt?"

He tried to smile cheerfully, but he was lapsing again into unconsciousness.

"Not very. I—I can't talk, darling. Don't bother about me."

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